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THE  
IMPORTANCE  
OF THE  
COWGATE-BRIDGE, &c.

CONSIDERED.

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*By James Brown Architect.*



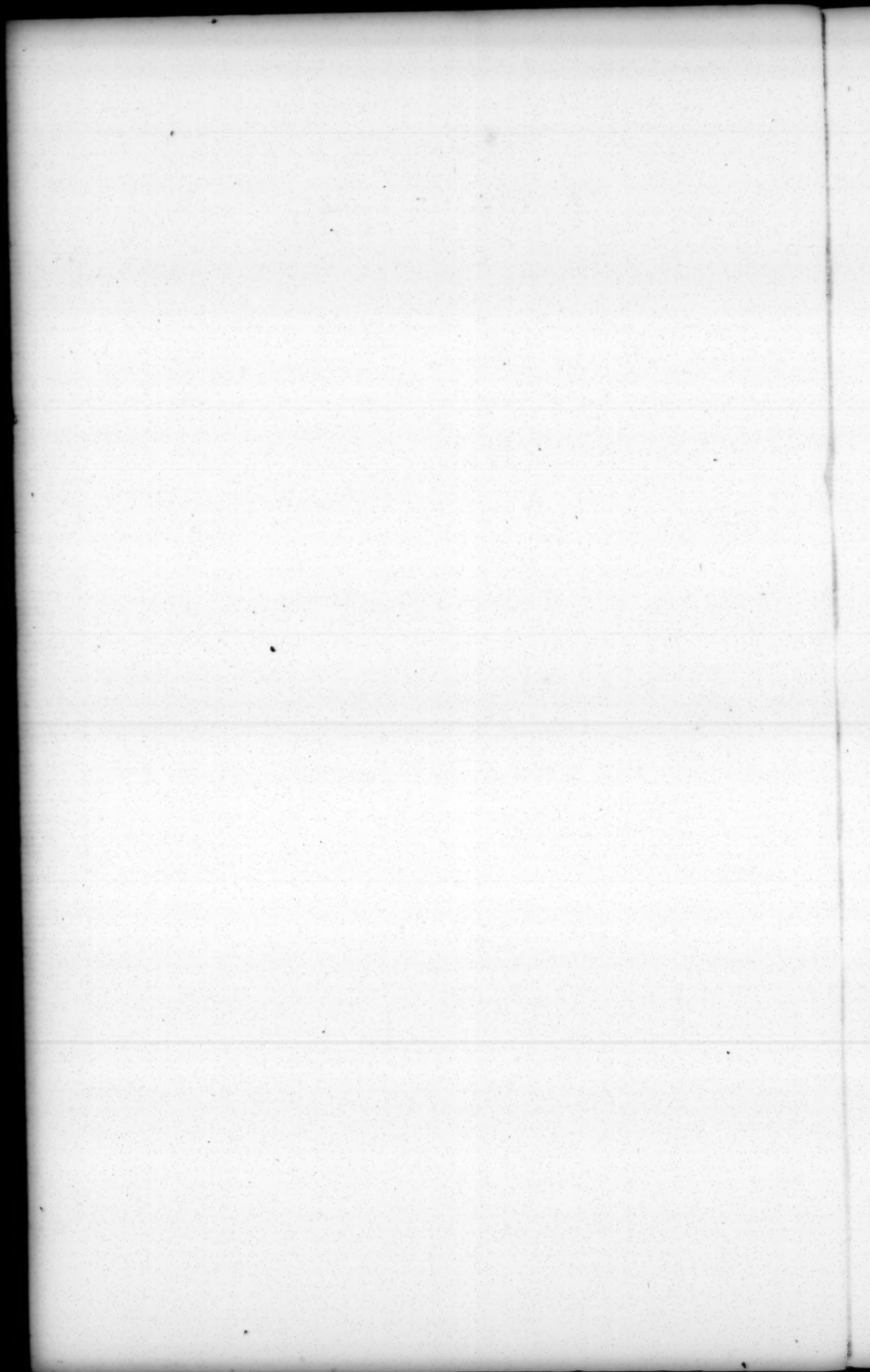
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*Gough Scotland 260<sup>10</sup>*



A S T H E  
ACQUIREMENTS OF THE AGE  
ARISE FROM THE EFFORTS OF MILLIONS,  
PERSONAL IMPORTANCE IS LOST;  
TO THE PUBLIC, THEREFORE,  
IS DEDICATED,  
THE FOLLOWING  
ATTEMPT IN HER FAVOUR,  
BY THE  
AUTHOR.





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T H E  
I M P O R T A N C E  
O F T H E  
C O W G A T E - B R I D G E , &c.

**A**S schemes for public utility, however necessary, can seldom be introduced without objections, and even difficulties, I am therefore not surpris'd that the much needed improvements of a Road to Leith, by the side of the Foot-walk, and of a Bridge over the Cowgate, should have opposers. The introduction of toll-bar-duties into this country was censured, and opposed by many, as a tax ruinous to industry; and it is probable that no reasoning whatever  
could

could alone have prevailed with us to establish so gainful a police, had not its favourers had example of its utility in our neighbouring country. Turnpike-roads have undoubtedly reduced the price of carriage and of provisions, as the produce of remote farms are now brought to market easier than formerly. Numbers of people, under 50 years of age, remember the time when the bulk of our internal commerce, particularly coals, grain and meal, was circulated on horse-back-loads. When the tolls took place, carts, in most places, were impracticable ; and where they were used, 800 weight was a heavy and difficult load for two horses, whereas, at present, 1200 weight on a one horse-cart is common through the year ; and, at times, a one horse-cart loads 1600 weight.

The following anecdote is worthy of attention, as it illustrates what has been said. Since the establishment of turnpikes, an active and worthy farmer in the Pleasance of Edinburgh, purchased, on the estate of Hauston, 12 miles from Edinburgh at  
least

least, a growing crop of corn, which, in due time, was reaped, and ready for leading in. The curiosity of the neighbours was excited to know where the purchaser was to lodge his corn. He answered, "In Edinburgh;" and was thought lunatic, or what you will. Next morning, however, by day-break, the people, with astonishment, beheld the crop loaded on 50 carts, and moving to the capital. I question much, if a sheriff, a hundred years ago, with his *posse comitatis*, could have done as much. So that, in reality, money paid at a toll-bar may justly be said to be a trade, yielding a ready-money profit of some hundreds *per cent.* This police, however, the most profitable to the country of any I recollect, neither is, nor indeed could possibly be, established on principles by which each user of the road must pay a toll bearing an exact proportion to the goodness or length of the road used. Our benefactors, I mean the gentlemen of the county, wisely adopted more enlarged, and indeed, strictly speaking, more just views; provided all were benefited,



fited, it was neither necessary, nor possible, that the benefit should be equal : They properly, therefore, considered the county at large as one family, or incorporation, subjected to a moderate expence in order to obtain an object, profitable, pleasant, and essentially necessary ; and therefore the money raised at all the toll-bars was appropriated to the making and to the mending of all the roads, and of all the bridges within the shire ; so that, with justice, the money raised at Broughton, or any other toll-bar, is liable to repairs on Gala-water, and to the building Dalhousie, Slatefoord, or indeed any other bridge. There surely is some delusive charm in complaining ; hence Mile-end patriots, and despairing lovers in rhyme. Opposition was made to the removal of the Cross and of the Nether-Bow Port from our streets. Physicians, in direct despite to their own noses, opposed cleansing the streets of Madrid. The use of Scripture in national language was treated in the same manner ; and the Universities of Spain owe to opposition their ignorance



norance of Newton's Philosophy. Opposition was made to the Scots, or new pavement in London ; and the opposers of our much-needed additions and amendments, have added themselves to the above catalogue.

In a company I once heard complaints against the sums expended, and the partiality shown to the great road, south back of the Canongate, which was repaired, or rather made out of the 1 s. 6 d. duty on houses in Edinburgh. In the above company a question was put to the plaintiff, Suppose all the 1 s. 6 d. you have paid had been applied to this road alone, and suppose it to be in your option to receive back all your money, and to reduce the road to its ancient state, query, What answer could you give ?

*Nolint atqui licet esse beatis.*

In the good city of Edinburgh, so justly celebrated for high houses and nastiness, thank heaven, we have our share of citizens, more attentive to the public

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than their own affairs. One citizen, and to his praise be it said, shows us the benefit, even the necessity, of an woollen-manufacture. Another fondly dreams that it is possible to find a set of citizens who will administrate the city-revenue with applause, and nevertheless pay L. 1000 *per annum* of our heavy debts. The said dreamer, neither in his visions nor when awake, could he in any dictionary find the word DIGNITY to signify that the Shopkeeper of yesterday, became the Right Honourable of to-day, should give to shopkeepers, shoemakers, peutherers, bonnetmakers, &c. &c. &c, sumptuous, elegant entertainments from the funds of a minor oppressed with debts. For my part, however zealous for both the manufacture and the œconomy, I shall, with my best wishes of success, leave them with their authors, and promise them my tribute of applause when either of these schemes are begun. In the mean time, experience has shown that a bridge in Edinburgh is practicable; and surely no body is so great a  
favourer

favourer of antiquity and ugliness, or so dispirited with difficulties still attending that useful work, as to wish that the North-bridge, and all its consequential fine buildings in the New-town were to vanish “ like the baseless fabric of a vision, and chaos come again.”

Law, education, and agreeable entertainment to strangers, may be called the staple articles of the trade of Edinburgh. The two first articles cannot be hurt by improving the avenues of the town and neighbourhood ; on the contrary, education must be benefited ; for to speak of college-education only, and suppose a competition betwixt colleges in such case *cæteris paribus*, the most agreeable place would obtain the preference.

A new College is much talked of, because very much needed ; but whether it takes place, or whether we must still be content with the old one, every person must admit that the present avenues are very bad, and that the Cowgate-bridge will afford a new one easy and suitable.

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An attractive or agreeable residence for strangers, Edinburgh can never be called, unless our avenues are rendered more commodious. What must strangers from the south think of our capital, which they must enter at the hazard of their lives, through a colonade of tattered breeches, and cascades pouring upon them those strongly perfumed odours for which Auld Reikie has so long been famous :

*Pudet hæc opprobria nobis,  
Et dici potuisse, et non potuisse refelli.*

From the West-port to bottom of the Canongate, is a stretch of above a Scots mile : There are, no doubt, passages from thence to the High-street. Let us enter them. The West-bow is very narrow, and notwithstanding its being cut zigzag, is an ascent of 21 inches in every 12 feet, so that few people in carriages, and in their sober senses, ever use it. Niddry's-wynd is made with so scrupulous a regard to our favourite narrowness, that, at its entry, both wheels of a carriage rub  
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the side-walls : Most of our other passes are impervious to any beast of burden. I question if two well fed magistrates, even of this country, could pass each other in some of them, without manifest inconvenience ; and in all these lanes, justly termed closes, the annoyance and hazard to passengers is very great, as the houses on each side are raised eight or ten stories a-piece. St Mary's-wynd remains as our only passage from South to North. From the Cowgate-port to the ruins and nastiness at the Nether-bow, this wynd measures about 500 feet, and in some places is only 12 feet, 6 inches broad. It is almost needless to make any comment on such manifest inconveniencies : It may not, however, be amiss to observe again, that formerly, owing to bad roads, our internal commerce was mostly circulated on horse-back loads, whereas now carts are universally in fashion, and of late some wag-gons have appeared. It appears from the Excise-books, that the carriage-duty *anno* 1747, when it commenced, amounted  
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only to L. 1200 Sterling, whereas, in *annid* 1774, it produced no less than L. 5174. How can the pass of St. Mary's-wynd accommodate this increase of carriages ?

But further : The West-road to Leith is begun, and will soon, and at all events independent of the bridge in question, be compleated, which, of course, must throw a great addition of carriages upon our present hazardous sole, and inevitable pass from South to North.

But besides all these inconveniencies, St Mary's-wynd may justly be held in execration for the frequent offence there given to pious ears, by the profane swearing of bucks, blackguards, coachmen, carters, and fine gentlemen in and out of livery. It might be made a subject of curious enquiry, Whether more souls are daily damned in this pass than are saved weekly at our many pious public places, for which our Good Town has of late become so famous, and our Charity-Work-house so great a sufferer. My zeal for the good of my country makes me use the freedom to suggest to the Right Honourable

neighbourable Lord Provost, Magistrates and Council, that the precious life of the Right Honourable Sir Laurence Dundas, Baronet, Member of Parliament for Richmond and for Edinburgh, in his annual or biennial visits, may, in the narrows of St. Mary's-wynd, or sharp turns of the Nether-bow, be exposed to danger. This *valuable* consideration will, I hope, have due weight with the Honourable Council.

Excepting landlords in the old Town, I see no good objection that an inhabitant of Leith or Edinburgh can have against the intended Bridge. It will be most people's interest to use the west in preference to the east-road. A cart-load of London goods, in value some scores, sometimes some hundreds of pounds, pays the wonderful tax of a halfpenny. Observe, however, that the carter has a shorter and easier road, can go four, in place of three times a-day, and is therefore a gainer. But even should this bugbear halfpenny be paid by the shop-keeper himself, a single pair of hose bought  
at



at his shop by a stranger is a gainful return.

It is strenuously contended by some, that the Bridge, if attended with a half-penny additional toll through the shire, will be oppressive to the poor. The contrary, however, is fairly to be presumed, as good roads have already most undoubtedly sunk the price of carriage; and surely both the bridge and west-road to Leith are justly intitled to such appellation, and must necessarily, and to a considerable degree, contribute to the same good end. It is further to be observed, that the Cowgate, in particular, gains a very advantageous new access. As Merline's-wynd is to be made a thoroughfare, 15 feet wide from top to bottom, which will be a better access than the present sole pass of St Mary's-wynd, and will be a full recompence to the Cowgate for any loss it can sustain; at the same time, the public gains three contiguous markets on the east-side of *New Merline's-wynd*, which, tho' less than one could wish, will be better than the two present markets,



markets, and an improvement of course. I further observe to these patrons of the poor, namely, the opposers of the Bridge, that the consumptions of the rich are the surest and indeed the very best charities to the poor.

Many magnificent houses of late have been built, and are still building in and near Edinburgh, Are the consumptions of such opulent families no objects of our attention? I may venture to affirm, that without the North-bridge, many of them could not have existed, and why may not the South-bridge be an inducement to build more.

It may be a laudable wish, but is surely a vain attempt, to confine buildings to that spot only where they will be most advantageous to the corporation of Edinburgh. The public will not bear a Dictator in these matters, and must be left at entire liberty. By this intended Bridge, a communication is rendered easy and safe betwixt the country and the town, at least the greater part of the town; and every street gains relief from

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their present confusion and danger, arising from narrow streets, and frequency of carriages ; and at same time an easier communication is opened from town and county, to the port of Leith, to the manifest advantage of the commerce and accommodations of all.

Last year the Council of Edinburgh published a bill, proposing to impose two-pence *per* cart (causeway-mail still continuing) on the west road betwixt Leith and Edinburgh. I will not affirm that even this high rate would have been injurious to carriages ; it would, on the contrary, in my humble opinion, have reduced it : At present a half-penny toll is proposed, at which small expence, we are to have both the above road and the South Bridge. Will the proposers of the first toll oppose, must they not on the contrary, applaud and adopt the intended amendment ? It is surely unusual goodness in the Honourable Council, to collect the sense of their constituents against the Bridge, &c. offered to the public at the cost of a half-penny toll. When  
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they elect a member of Parliament, and when they propose two-pence *per* cart, to make the west road to Leith; only, they acted otherwise, and I must thence infer, they were afraid to know the opinion of their constituents on these heads. This conduct is liable to the imputation of inconsistency: The corporation is likewise taxed with breach of faith to the county, at the time when the Exchange or the North Bridge, and other improvements were in hand: I am told, and believe, that a South Bridge, or other commodious access, was then promised; and that a worthy Baronet then subscribed for, and paid twenty guineas, principally, though *inter alia*, for the said South Bridge, or other commodious access from the South to the town. I am neither possessed of the Act of Parliament, nor of any occasional publications relating to the above matters, and therefore humbly request an Advocate, abler than myself, to illustrate a subject so much connected with the present well meant, and obvious improvements.

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It is further objected against the additional halfpenny toll, that it is unequal, consequently unjust, and that many carriages must pay for a Bridge they never use. The force of this objection is, I think, already obviated, by what is already said on the propriety of the present method of raising money for the county roads and bridges. But farther, why do people on the west of Edinburgh, use roads and bridges, made in part at the expence of those who never travel that way? Because they in return, are subjected to similar payments for other roads: Because this mode is the only one practicable, and has procured for both town and county, singular benefits, and is continued now as the best that experience has suggested. In short, if every trifling objection can put a negative on useful and important schemes, none could proceed. Surely, in London, many watermen and families were reduced to difficulties and to poverty, by building Westminster and Black-Frier's bridges: Their complaints, however worthy of private compassion,



compassion, were not admitted in bar of public utilities.

It is said, Parliament would never have granted additional tolls at all the avenues of London, in order to build Black-Frier's bridge; and similarity of reason is urged against our own. It is evident, no other than conjectural answers can be made to this conjectural objection. I am however inclined to think, that had the toll of Black-Frier's bridge been inadequate to the expence, that in such case, the wisdom of Parliament would have adapted our method, or possibly some national charge, rather than have lost to the metropolis so obvious an advantage. If I mistake not, Westminster bridge was built at the national expence; and I have heard that certain improvements in Oxford, were executed, by parliamentary authority, at the expence of the shire.

The only solid objections I know against the Bridge, are, 1<sup>st</sup>, That the rents of the old Town may sink; and, 2<sup>d</sup>, The raising the same cess and stent on subjects

jects diminished in value, must be ruinous. The first of these objections, I candidly confess I cannot answer. The sufferers may be objects of compassion, but as we all hold property subservient to the public good, objections founded on private regards can be of no avail, and always have been overlooked; as witness the said proprietors of old Edinburgh, whose property is said to have sunk by building the New Town. Witness further, the watermen of London, and many similar cases.

To the sufferers with us, if any there shall be, we recommend more œconomy and more industry. Their objections are personal and temporary, and can never be admitted as a bar to public, extensive, and permanent benefits.

I pretend not to say what reduction of rent has lately happened in old Edinburgh; rents of all kinds, especially of houses, are liable to variations. The rents of old Edinburgh, till a recent period, had been gradually on the rise, and were indeed got to a surprising height,

height, some one-third, others one-half advanced. The precise period of the variations I cannot ascertain. To make the subject however more intelligible, we will suppose the advance to have existed from 1730 to 1760, and the reverse or decline, from 1760 till now. It must be admitted, that Edinburgh paid its cefs in 1730. Many new houses in the high street, Horse-wynd, Cowgate, Argyle's-square, Grass-market, Adams's buildings, Butter's buildings, &c. &c. were erected betwixt 1730 and 1760; and Brown's-square, and Society buildings, &c. &c. since: So that I am dubious whether the rents of old Edinburgh, when aided with the above buildings are not higher, at least as high now as in the year 1730. But when we all know, that New Edinburgh bears its share of the King's cefs, will the opposers of the Bridge seriously contend, that the houses both in the Old and New Town, yield a rent at present which is less than that of Old Edinburgh alone in the 1730. Old Edinburgh at present possesses



ses the shop-business, if an access to them is denied to the opulent families on the south, the shop-business must, and will go to them: No tradesman surely will entertain the absurd idea of compelling the rich, at the hazard of their lives, to lay out their money at his shop. We deride, and possibly with reason, the political bustle of London tradesmen. They have my good will to blunder on in national interests. I venture however to affirm, that the grossest Alderman of them all, will never think it his interest to obstruct the coaches of the great from the west end of the town to the city shops. If opposition to the Bridge proceeds from an envious spirit, few passions are easier propagated, and retaliation may suggest family, and other compacts, in support of shops in the south, if access is denied to the high street.

To contend for extension of royalty over grounds gaining benefit from commodious avenues, is an endless claim, and therefore impracticable.

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To make Edinburgh an agreeable residence for opulent strangers, is the wish, because the interest of all, and it were surely great vanity to affirm that our modern sumptuous buildings in the New Town, the suburbs and neighbourhood, were all erected by emigrants from Old Edinburgh. Other reasons have concurred: A city life daily gains ground: Mixed society is more in fashion: Our women begin to reform our tastes, and happily to seduce us from hunting, from hard drinking, and the monastic study of the combinations of Whist.

As to the 2<sup>d</sup> objection about the cess, I hold it a sufficient answer, to assert that Edinburgh and suburbs are higher rented than they were fifty years ago; and consequently, as an aggregate body, are abler to pay public burdens.

Upon the whole, it can hardly be denied, that the proposed Bridge is become essentially necessary, and must be beneficial to town and county in general. The bulk of those who must pay the intended toll, will find it a very pro-

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fitable outlay of money: It is calculated as much as possible to ease merchandize, and to lay the burden on four wheel-carriages, and the opulent. There is no person who pays the toll, but must at times use the Bridge, on which there is to be no toll-bar, and reap benefits from it either at once, or consequentially.

The bugbear of a half-penny a-cart, might possibly have puzzled the Exchequer of our magnanimous King William the Lion, when their R. H. the Princesses of Scotland, darned their own stockings; if (with reverence be it said) they did not for most part walk without any stockings at all. But at this time of day, when a gentleman finds in Edinburgh, accommodations which our beautiful Queen Mary had not even in Paris, a *babie*-objection started against a scheme, by which so many inconveniences will be removed, and so many utilities acquired, will, I trust the sense of mankind, be likened to the dust of the balance, and to be altogether vanity.

F I N I S.



